

# Issues surrounding the authorship and dating of The Pastoral Epistles

---

The Pastoral Epistles (1 Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus) are part of the New Testament canon in all Christian communions today. All three are attributed to the Apostle Paul. The earliest manuscripts include them, and from Irenaeus through to the eighteenth century they have been almost universally accepted as the work of Paul (*Pauline*). This essay sets out to discuss the evidence for authorship and dating.

The discussion will outline a number of difficulties in accepting Pauline authorship, and some of the responses from scholars who wish to maintain that the tradition is accurate. Related issues of pseudonymity (writing under an assumed name) and the development of the New Testament canon will be considered, along with further factors indicating a post-Pauline dating. Finally some consideration will be given to the purpose of the author of the Pastorals.

The problems associated with Pauline authorship are many, and while no single factor may be beyond debate, the cumulative case is impressive.

**The chronology needed to make sense of events in the Pastorals does not fit with either Acts or the seven unchallenged letters of Paul.**

*“We must either posit a major missionary campaign passed over in silence by Acts, or place the events referred to in Titus after a supposed first hearing*

*and release of Paul.*”<sup>1</sup>

That the second reconstruction is not impossible is demonstrated by Catholic scholar Jerome Murphy O'Connor who can state: “All that can be known of Paul's two-year Roman imprisonment (Acts 28:30) is that he was eventually set free.”<sup>2</sup> This however is a position not widely shared. Wayne Meeks states that “the itinerary [the Pastorals] assume seems an artificial construction by an author unfamiliar with Acts,”<sup>3</sup> while Udo Schnelle notes that the “historical situation presupposed in the Pastoral Epistles cannot be harmonized either with the data of Acts or with that of the authentic Pauline letters.”<sup>4</sup>

### **The vocabulary of the Pastorals is un-Pauline.**

*“The Pastorals manifest numerous exceptional linguistic features.”*<sup>5</sup>

Walter F. Taylor lists the following characteristics: Important words and phrases are missing (including righteousness of God, cross, freedom); words are invested with different meanings, including faith (discussed below); many words used in the undisputed letters are replaced (e.g. *despotēs* is substituted for *kyrios* when referring to a slave owner); those words exclusively found in the Pastorals are theologically significant, including *eusebia* (discussed below); many short words used in the undisputed letters are missing in the Pastorals (eleven are listed); and the writing style is closer

---

1 C. K. Barrett, *The Pastoral Epistles*. New Clarendon Bible (New Testament), ed. H. F. D. Sparks (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 9.

2 Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul: His Story* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 218.

3 Wayne A. Meeks, *The Writings of St. Paul: A Norton Critical Edition* (New York & London: Norton, 1972), 134.

4 Udo Schnelle, *The History and Theology of the New Testament Writings*. Trans. by M. Eugene Boring (London: SCM, 1998), 328.

5 Schnelle, *The History and Theology of the New Testament Writings*, 330.

to Hellenistic literature.<sup>6</sup> Barrett observes; “if Paul wrote the Pastorals he used a new stock of words in doing so.”<sup>7</sup>

**Jesus is never called “Son of God” in the Pastorals.<sup>8</sup>**

This is a theologically significant omission, distinguishing the Christology of the author (“the Pastor”) from Paul's.

**The adoption of the term “saviour” is uncharacteristic.**

Outside the Pastorals this term is only used once (Phil. 3:20),<sup>9</sup> and then in the context of the future appearance of Christ.<sup>10</sup> Taylor notes that its presence in the Pastorals indicates “greater use of Hellenistic terminology, since 'savior' is used for the Roman emperor as well as for mystery religion deities.”<sup>11</sup> Helmut Koester observes that “[t]he title 'Savior God' (Tit 2:10) would be unique in the entire theological language of 1st-century Christianity.”<sup>12</sup>

**The Pastor does not engage with his opponent's thought in the way Paul does.**

Paul argues his case, often using the very terms his opponents prefer against

---

6 William F. Taylor, Jr., “1-2 Timothy, Titus,” in *The Deutero-Pauline Letters*, ed. Gerhard Krodel. *Proclamation Commentaries*, revised edition (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 64-65.

7 Barrett, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 6.

8 Paul Trebilco, *The Early Christians in Ephesus from Paul to Ignatius* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 199.

9 Trebilco, *The Early Christians in Ephesus*, 199.

10 Helmut Koester, *Introduction to the New Testament*, Vol. 2. *History and Literature of Early Christianity*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (New York & Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2000), 301.

11 Taylor, “1-2 Timothy, Titus,” 67.

12 Koester, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 301.

them. In contrast the Pastor is content to simply denounce and deal in generalities.<sup>13</sup> Tradition is the Pastor's weapon of choice against opponents. "The author does not argue with the heretics (with the possible exception of 1 Tim. 4:1-5), for they do not agree with the tradition (1 Tim. 6:20; cf. 2 Tim. 1:14; 2:2)."<sup>14</sup>

**The structure and organisation of the church described in the Pastorals is too developed for Paul's lifetime.**

The term *presbyteros* is absent from the undisputed letters. "Bishop" occurs only once (Phil. 1:1) where, unlike the Pastorals, it is used in the plural. "The various offices and their occupants assume a centrality not seen in the undisputed letters."<sup>15</sup> *Charisma* is no longer given to all believers, but applied to office holders. The Pastorals take a long stride toward hierarchy.

**The Pastor's concept of epiphany is out of place in Paul's writings.**

The *parousia* becomes the epiphany,<sup>16</sup> a major change in emphasis. At one end is Christ's first appearance, at the other his return, with the present an "in-between time."<sup>17</sup> The term epiphany does not appear in the seven undisputed letters, and only once in the deuterio-Pauline writings (2 Thess. 2:8).

This sharp distinction between the eschatology of Paul and the Pastor is not only evident in the language of epiphany, but in the focus on the present time, with the church taking on new significance as an institution at the centre of the age. The expectation of Jesus' return "is more a theological

---

13 Trebilco, *The Early Christians in Ephesus*, 199.

14 Taylor, "1-2 Timothy, Titus," 66.

15 *Ibid.*, 66.

16 Schnelle, *The History and Theology of the New Testament Writings*, 331.

17 Taylor, "1-2 Timothy, Titus," 67.

datum than a living expectation.”<sup>18</sup> While the opponents have an over-realized eschatology (they hold that the resurrection is past), the Pastorals have also moved part way in this direction: Christians can take hold of eternal life now (1 Tim. 6:12, 19).<sup>19</sup>

A related point, made by Koester, is that the ground of Christian ethics is affected by the change in eschatology.<sup>20</sup> Galatians 3:28 is sidelined. Christian behaviour as the Pastor conceives it is indistinguishable from the accepted Roman virtues. The Reign of God does not impact on the barriers separating genders and classes; those barriers are instead shored up.

**The concept of piety (eusebia) is out of place in Paul's writings.**

True Christian conduct in the Pastorals is called “religion” (*eusebia*),<sup>21</sup> meaning piety and godliness, also in tune with Roman values. The term is not found in the unchallenged letters.<sup>22</sup> The Latin equivalent, *pietas*, referred to religious devotion to the Roman state.<sup>23</sup>

**The concept of a deposit of truth and emphasis on sound teachings are uncharacteristic of Paul.**

There is a change in tone from the seven undisputed letters on the significance of sound teaching.<sup>24</sup> The new stress is on tradition, a deposit of

---

18 *Ibid.*, 68.

19 *Ibid.*, 68.

20 Koester, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 305.

21 *Ibid.*, 301.

22 It is however found in Luke/Acts (and only there), and is used as evidence of Lukan involvement in authorship (see below). Mark Harding, *What Are They Saying About The Pastoral Epistles* (New York: Paulist Press, 2001), 17.

23 Taylor, “1-2 Timothy, Titus,” 68.

24 Trebilco, *The Early Christians in Ephesus*, 200.

truth, which provides a kind of yardstick. The deposit must be kept inviolate and guarded, not developed or interpreted:<sup>25</sup> an unexpected emphasis coming from the innovative Apostle to the Gentiles.

**The portrayal of Timothy and Titus as inexperienced ministers does not fit with what we know of them.**

Barrett notes that the portrait given of both addressees in the Pastorals “scarcely corresponds with that which is given in Acts and the genuine epistles.”<sup>26</sup> Timothy was an experienced minister, a companion of Paul in his travels and co-writer of epistles. Schnelle asks: “What themes and problems are addressed with which Timothy would not have long since been familiar from his long years of service as a co-worker in the Pauline mission?”<sup>27</sup> In 2 Timothy he is treated as young and inexperienced. 2 Corinthians indicates that Titus too was a senior person. From these observations Barrett concludes that the portrait which emerges in the Pastorals is fictitious.<sup>28</sup>

**The Pastorals put forward different views from Paul's on matters like remarriage, widows and asceticism in the church.**

The Pastor seems clearly at variance with Paul on a number of practical issues. A comparison between 1 Cor. 7:7-8 and 1 Tim. 2:11-15; 3:2-5 (on marriage) demonstrates that the author felt he had the authority to alter Paul's teaching.

**The Pastoral criteria for ministry could well exclude Paul.**

---

25 Meeks, *The Writings of St. Paul*, 134.

26 Barrett, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 9.

27 Schnelle, *The History and Theology of the New Testament Writings*, 329.

28 Barrett, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 10.

Raymond Brown points out that Paul himself “might not have been able to meet several requirements the Pastorals would impose on the presbyter-bishops.”<sup>29</sup> Apart from the more subjective assessments which Brown mentions (e.g. “not quick tempered”), questions might also be asked about the requirements concerning marital status.

### **The concept of faith has been redefined in the Pastorals.**

In the Pastorals “the faith” takes on new meaning: “believing the right thing over against heresy.”<sup>30</sup> Faith, demoted, now exists alongside other virtues such as love, holiness and modesty (1 Tim. 2:15). This is very different from Paul's radical conception of faith.

### **The role of women has been limited in the Pastorals.**

The egalitarian view of the undisputed letters (Gal. 3:28; Rom. 16:1-3, 6-7; 1 Cor. 7:1-7) has given way to the societal mores of the day (1 Tim. 2: 8-15; 5:3-16).<sup>31</sup> Women's roles are severely constrained. The Pastorals sanction, in Frances Young's words, “a top-down culture of subordination.”<sup>32</sup>

### **The function of law and good works has been redefined in the Pastorals.**

There are statements about the law and good works in the Pastorals “which would have satisfied Paul's Galatian opponents.”<sup>33</sup> The law is good, and its proper function is to restrain wrongdoers (1 Tim. 1:8-11). How far this concept of the Law is from Paul's can be gauged from Romans 7:7-12.<sup>34</sup>

---

29 Raymond E. Brown, *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), 35.

30 Schnelle, *The History and Theology of the New Testament Writings*, 331.

31 Taylor, “1-2 Timothy, Titus,” 69.

32 Cited in Harding, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 106.

33 Meeks, *The Writings of St. Paul*, 134.

34 Leander E. Keck and Victor Paul Furnish. *The Pauline Letters*. Interpreting Biblical Texts, ed.

The case against Pauline authorship is substantial, but Mark Harding (who counts the Pastorals as deutero-Pauline) states that it would be a serious mistake to simply dismiss the case made by those holding to traditional authorship.<sup>35</sup> A number of explanations for the difficulties discussed above have been offered.

**The discrepancies reflect changed factors or circumstances in Paul's life.**

One example offered is that Paul is writing personal letters to individuals. L. Michael White however notes that the Pastorals are in fact “less personal – despite being addressed to individuals – and more hieratic than the known genuine letters.”<sup>36</sup>

**Paul relied heavily on a secretary.**

This hypothesis suggests Paul produced a general outline, but left the actual composition to a secretary.<sup>37</sup> Paul may then have “signed off” the final version. There are different accounts by scholars over the possible details,<sup>38</sup> but any secretary must have enough freedom that the work is more theirs than Paul's. Taylor notes that the secretary theory “raises as many problems as it initially appears to solve and, ironically, points to someone other than Paul as the author.”<sup>39</sup>

---

Lloyd R. Bailey and Victor P. Furnish (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 144.

35 Harding, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 19.

36 L. Michael White, *From Jesus to Christianity: How Four Generations of Visionaries & Storytellers Created the New Testament and Christian Faith* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2004), 428.

37 A counter-theory (Michael Prior) suggests the opposite, that the differences can be explained by Paul's writing without secretaries in the Pastorals. Harding, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 23.

38 Taylor notes contrasts between Kelly on one hand, and Roller and Jeremias on the other. Taylor, “1-2 Timothy, Titus,” 70.

39 *Ibid.*, 70.

### **The Pastorals have been compiled by Luke.**

This is a variant of the secretary hypothesis, based on similarities between Luke/Acts and the Pastorals.<sup>40</sup> An example appears in Acts 20:18-35/2Tim. 4:6-8.<sup>41</sup> It has also been suggested that the Pastorals are the missing third volume projected by Luke.<sup>42</sup> However there are difficulties with these reconstructions, one significant one being the status of Paul's apostleship. Luke is reluctant to confer this title on Paul, and in Acts he is portrayed as subordinate to the Jerusalem leadership. In the Pastorals he is an apostle without peer.<sup>43</sup> It might be added that Paul seems to have employed trained scribes for most of his letters (cf. Rom. 16:22).<sup>44</sup> The process, involving autographic superscriptions, is described in some detail by David Trobisch.<sup>45</sup>

### **The Pastorals contain genuine fragments from Paul's letters.**

This is the view favoured by Barrett,<sup>46</sup> who lists five fragments. He contends that these “seem, on literary, historical, and doctrinal grounds, to be thoroughly Pauline.” The suggestion is that a later hand incorporated these fragments into their work.

Taylor notes however that there is no exact parallel for this procedure in ancient literature, and that precisely which sections of the Pastorals make up the hypothetical fragments varies from scholar to scholar, showing that their

---

40 Trebilco, *The Early Christians in Ephesus*, 201.

41 Taylor, “1-2 Timothy, Titus,” 71.

42 Harding, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 111n7.

43 Taylor, “1-2 Timothy, Titus,” 71.

44 White, *From Jesus to Christianity*, 428.

45 David Trobisch, *Paul's Letter Collection: Tracing the Origins* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 29.

46 Barrett, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 10.

identification is anything but self-evident.<sup>47</sup> Clare Duffy seems to reject the fragment hypothesis completely, viewing the “personal notes” as part of a competent pseudonymous author’s arsenal.<sup>48</sup>

Are the counter-arguments then convincing? Barrett, among others, does not find them so.<sup>49</sup> Koester is blunt in his dismissal.

[M]ore recent scholarship has accumulated such an overwhelming number of conclusive arguments against the authenticity of the Pastoral Epistles that Pauline authorship can only be maintained on the basis of tortuous hypotheses and an amassing of historical improbabilities.<sup>50</sup>

Meeks again raises the issue of pseudonymity.

[T]he evidence to the contrary is so extensive that it is doubtful whether anyone would continue to defend the traditional position apart from reluctance to admit that a deliberate fiction could have been accepted into the New Testament canon. Yet the practice of pseudonymous publication was so common in antiquity that it would be astonishing if no pseudonymous work (among the dozens that we know of in early Christian literature) made it into the canon.<sup>51</sup>

Pseudonymity is a feature of much of the Christian literature from the first two centuries: “how much remains a contentious issue.”<sup>52</sup> The question of the ethics of pseudonymity seems complex. “[T]here remains a vigorous debate over its legitimacy.”<sup>53</sup> Bart Ehrman notes that: “forgery” was a widespread practice at the

---

47 Taylor, “1-2 Timothy, Titus,” 72.

48 “[T]hey were an important part of the fiction and for the author’s purpose to work, the fiction must be convincing.” Clare Duffy, “The Pastoral Epistles,” in *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, ed. John Barton and John Muddiman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1221.

49 Barrett, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 7.

50 Koester, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 301.

51 Meeks, *The Writings of St. Paul*, 132.

52 Frances Young, “Introduction: the Literary Culture of the Earliest Christianity,” in *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frances Young, Lewis Ayres and Andrew Louth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 9.

53 Dennis Ronald MacDonald, *The Legend and the Apostle: The Battle for Paul in Story and Canon* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 55.

time;<sup>54</sup> that it was almost universally condemned;<sup>55</sup> and yet it was taught as part of a rhetorical education and practiced in some philosophical schools.<sup>56</sup> He also notes precedent in works like the *Acts of Paul* and *3 Corinthians*,<sup>57</sup> and the well-worn strategy of pseudonymous writers in actually warning their readers about the danger of being fooled by pseudonymous documents (e.g. the *Apostolic Constitutions*).<sup>58</sup>

The motivation of the Pastor seems, on one level, clear. He attempts to bring Paul back from the grave so he can address a new generation with genuine concerns that require firm guidance. But would Paul have stood “idly by while the church ‘moved on,’ as it were, into the mainstream of Gentile culture and social sensibility...”?<sup>59</sup>

A common suggestion is authorship by a Pauline school or community, perhaps based in Ephesus. Richard Norris assumes this,<sup>60</sup> however Paul Trebilco reminds his readers that, in the absence of evidence, “it must remain a hypothesis.”<sup>61</sup>

---

54 The example is given of Galen who felt the need to write a book “explaining how his authentic writings could be distinguished from those forged by others.” Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, third edition (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 373.

55 “Even in antiquity some rejected pseudonymity as a despicable deception.” MacDonald, *The Legend and the Apostle*, 55. “[E]ven the time in which the author of the Pastorals is writing would not have accepted the kind of disguise that he is using, had it been recognized.” Gerd Lüdemann, *Heretics: The Other Side of Early Christianity*, trans. John Bowden (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 141. Mark Harding points out that defenders of Pauline authorship “remind their audience that the early fathers... were contemptuous of works they had reason to believe were nothing but literary hoaxes.” Harding, *The Pastoral Epistles?*, 4.

56 The author uses strategies commended in the rhetorical handbooks. Harding, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 6.

57 Taylor also mentions the Epistle of Jeremiah, Epistle of Aristeas, 2 Clement and Barnabas. Taylor, “1-2 Timothy, Titus,” 72.

58 Ehrman, *The New Testament*, 373-375.

59 Harding, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 22.

60 Richard A. Norris, Jr., “The Apostolic and Sub-Apostolic Writings: the New Testament and the Apostolic Fathers,” in *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature*, 13.

61 Trebilco, *The Early Christians in Ephesus from Paul to Ignatius*, 206.

Wayne Meeks is particularly cautious about the existence of such a Pauline school.<sup>62</sup>

In moving to discuss the dating of the Pastorals, two areas can be considered; the reception of the documents as canonical, and the internal evidence.

Barrett suggests that Polycarp “can be confidently claimed to have known the Pastorals,”<sup>63</sup> however Taylor states that the supposed quotations are “common philosophical sayings that Polycarp could well have quoted independently of the Pastorals.”<sup>64</sup> Meeks concedes that passages in both Polycarp and Ignatius are strikingly similar, but simply establish a common milieu and date for the Pastorals with the other sources.<sup>65</sup>

The earliest certain quotation comes from Irenaeus who attributes them to Paul.<sup>66</sup> They are listed in the Muratorian Canon, and there is dispute over whether Marcion knew of them.<sup>67</sup> The P<sup>46</sup> document, which seems to correspond with the Valentinian corpus,<sup>68</sup> is often judged not to have included the Pastorals.<sup>69</sup> Once they are cited, however, they are always unambiguously credited to Paul (as, however, was Hebrews, which was given a central place in the corpus even though it makes no claim to come from Paul's hand.)<sup>70</sup> The evidence from the

---

62 “[The Pastorals and the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*] cannot be used with any confidence, either as evidence of any sort of social community or as independent testimony to any traditions of the Pauline groups...” Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1983), 8.

63 Barrett, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 1.

64 Taylor, “1-2 Timothy, Titus,” 61.

65 Meeks, *The Writings of St. Paul*, 133.

66 White, *From Jesus to Christianity*, 426.

67 Tertullian charges Marcion with intentionally excluding them. Harding, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 9.

68 *Ibid.*, 36.

69 This has been challenged. Harding, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 110n3.

70 Trobisch, *Paul's Letter Collection*, 11.

development of the NT canon is, at the very least, mixed.

Scholarly dating of the Pastorals has ranged over a full century, 60 -160 CE.<sup>71</sup> The later date is often associated with the theory (first suggested by F. C. Baur) that they include polemic against the teachings of Marcion, based on a reading of 1 Tim. 6:20. This view has few advocates today.<sup>72</sup>

Factors that have been used to argue for a particular dating include: the solidifying of church offices and hierarchy; similarity in style to the church fathers including *1 Clement*,<sup>73</sup> a refocusing away from the debates with Judaism and Jewish Christianity to engagement with Gentile society; possible anachronisms in the text, and allusions to other literature including the genuine letters of Paul and the *Acts of Paul*.

The organisation and structure of the church indicates a later date, comparable to that indicated in *1 Clement*.<sup>74</sup> However it does not seem to have developed as far as Ignatius and Polycarp presuppose in their letters,<sup>75</sup> although some scholars dissent from this conclusion.<sup>76</sup>

The Pastor's main concern is not primarily with Judaism or Jewish Christianity, but with the church's interface with the Roman world. "The debate with Judaism is no longer important; the church's reflection is rather

---

71 Robert A. Wild, "The Pastoral Letters," in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, Roland E. Murphy (London: Burns and Oates, 1989), 893.

72 Lüdemann seems to adopt this view. Lüdemann, *Heretics*, 200-201.

73 The distinction between the "Apostolic Fathers" and canonical literature is not always clear. "It is now recognized that apart from the genuine letters of Paul, the books of the New Testament were all written in the period (roughly) AD 70 and 140, and are thus largely contemporary with those contained in the collection of Apostolic Fathers..." Norris, "The Apostolic and Sub-Apostolic Writings," 11.

74 Trebilco, *The Early Christians in Ephesus from Paul to Ignatius*, 202-203.

75 Schnelle, *The New Testament Writings*, 333; Barrett, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 18.

76 "[T]here can no longer be any doubt that both authors [Polycarp and the Pastor] derive from one and the same milieu." Lüdemann, *Heretics*, 141.

focused on the position of the Christian community in a non-Christian pagan environment.”<sup>77</sup>

Possible anachronisms exist in the text. The best known may be 1 Tim. 6:20. David Trobisch gives a literal translation, preserving the terms *antitheses* and *gnosis*:

Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and from the *Antitheses* of what is falsely called *Gnosis*.

Could this be polemic directed against Marcion, the second century author of the *Antitheses*? Trobisch observes:

[A] second-century Christian probably could not help but think of Marcion and Gnosticism when he read those lines, understanding the passage as a prophetic warning. Without doubt it was the official policy of leaders of the catholic Christian Church, who promoted the canonical edition of the letters of Paul in the second century, to segregate from the Marcionite Church and from Gnosticism.<sup>78</sup>

This raises the issue of the literature which the Pastorals postdate. Taylor reports the identification of twenty-one “clear echoes” of Paul and notes some scholars who “argue that the use of the undisputed letters is a sign of the lateness... of the Pastorals.”<sup>79</sup> Trebilco, in contrast, notes that “if the Pastorals were written in the second century, it is striking that they do not actually quote Paul's own words.”<sup>80</sup>

Dennis MacDonald believes that the Pastorals have a polemic relationship to the oral tradition behind the apocryphal *Acts of Paul*, arguing for example

---

77 Schnelle, *The New Testament Writings*, 330.

78 Trobisch, *Paul's Letter Collection*, 43.

79 Taylor, “1-2 Timothy, Titus,” 65-66.

80 Trebilco, *The Early Christians in Ephesus from Paul to Ignatius*, 204.

that the reference to being rescued from the lion's mouth (2 Tim. 4:17) reflects the tale in the *Acts* where the apostle, like Androcles, evades his intended fate.<sup>81</sup>

If the Pastor's opponents could be identified (gnostic influences, for example) this could be decisive. Unfortunately the matter is problematic and there seems no clear consensus among scholars. Using the characteristics described by the Pastor is not straight-forward as his polemic follows the principles of ancient rhetoric.<sup>82</sup> "This consists of recognizably stock denunciations of their greed and deception, their failure to practice what they preach, their indulgence in verbal quibbling, and their predilection for subverting women."<sup>83</sup> The denunciations then tell us little about the opponents' beliefs and practices.

Barrett states that the opponents display both Jewish and gnostic elements.<sup>84</sup> Brown suggests that gnosticism is the challenge confronted, but concedes that more than one form of heterodox thought may have been targeted.<sup>85</sup> White mentions Marcionism, the asceticism of the Thecla stories and Gnosticism.<sup>86</sup> Ehrman, noting that some strands of Gnosticism were deeply rooted in Judaism, finds it reasonable to assume that 1 Timothy was directed against an early form of Christian Gnosticism.<sup>87</sup>

Paul Trebilco makes the following deductions about the opponents' identity from the textual evidence.<sup>88</sup> They arose from within the movement, they were

---

81 MacDonald, *The Legend and the Apostle*, 23.

82 Trebilco, *The Early Christians in Ephesus from Paul to Ignatius*, 209-210.

83 Harding, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 90.

84 Barrett, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 12-13. MacDonald refers to this pairing as an "unnatural hybrid." MacDonald, *The Legend and the Apostle*, 56.

85 Brown, *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind*, 39, 39n56.

86 White, *From Jesus to Christianity*, 429.

87 Ehrman, *The New Testament*, 387.

88 Trebilco, *The Early Christians in Ephesus from Paul to Ignatius*, 209-235.

persuasive (with perhaps special appeal to women), their teachings contained elements that reflected the Jewish origins of the church rather than the newly acquired Gentile culture,<sup>89</sup> they advocated an over-realized eschatology, and they drew on the radical elements in Paul's teachings for legitimation.<sup>90</sup> Trebilco clearly states that "it is very unlikely that the opponents are Gnostics."<sup>91</sup> This would favour a dating between 80 - 100 CE.<sup>92</sup>

MacDonald argues that the opponents were primarily the radical Paulinists of the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* tradition. By extension, those who the Pastor opposes might accuse him of making Paul himself his opponent.<sup>93</sup> This thesis accounts for the attitude to women and the concern for patriarchal values. His view is that the Pastorals date between 100 to 140 CE.<sup>94</sup>

Given the information available and the often conflicting reconstructions, what conclusions are reasonable regarding the authorship and dating of the Pastoral epistles? In answering this it is difficult to simply stick with the data without entering into some judgments.

**Any discussion of the Pastorals needs to deal with the issue of pseudonymity.**

The weight of the evidence clearly favours later authorship. Historically this

89 Abstinence from certain foods, on this reading, then reflects Jewish dietary laws rather than asceticism. Cf. Trebilco, *The Early Christians in Ephesus from Paul to Ignatius*, 224-225.

90 Barrett observes that "some of [Paul's] friends were no less embarrassing than his enemies", citing the *Gospel of Truth* and the Valentinians. Barrett, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 15.

91 Trebilco, *The Early Christians in Ephesus from Paul to Ignatius*, 215.

92 In contrast, Helmut Koester finds the following factors significant: a time of relative security for Christians, strong growth, a church order under which congregations operate, use of language appropriate to the second century (including terminology from the imperial cult). From this Koester suggests 120-160 CE. Koester, *History and Literature of Early Christianity*, 307.

93 "But there is yet another opponent denounced in the letters who seldom has been identified: Paul himself as depicted in the legend tradition." MacDonald, *The Legend and the Apostle*, 56-57.

94 Richard Norris states that they "doubtless belong in the first quarter or so of the second century." Norris, "The Apostolic and Sub-Apostolic Writings," 13.

is not a great problem: these letters are testimony to the faith of the young church and among “the first attempts to adapt the Pauline message in the acknowledgment that the particularities of Paul's day no longer apply.”<sup>95</sup> This is not, however, the extent of the authority they claim, and this in turn raises issues around the place of the Pastorals in the New Testament.

If these are not the words of Paul, it becomes important to understand the purpose of the unknown Pastor who wrote in his name. It seems that, for the Pastor, extreme danger existed if false teachers were permitted to proclaim unchallenged a corrupt version of Paul's gospel, with consequences that could derail the fledgling church. *In extremis*, and in Paul's name, the Pastor seeks his readers' “unqualified endorsement” of his counter-vision.<sup>96</sup> Whether the stratagem was justified is something his readers must struggle with. Has the “good fruit” outweighed the bad? Certainly the stratagem seems to have been successful.

**Precise dating, beyond the broad period of 80-150 CE, continues to be evasive.**

The data is capable of more than one reading, and no one reconstruction seems able to persuade convincingly, though a time much before 100 CE seems unlikely.

---

95 Harding, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 104.

96 *Ibid.*, 94.